METHODS AND APPARATUS FOR THREE-DIMENSIONAL GAMING

BACKGROUND

[0001] To maintain or increase player interest in electronic casino games, game manufactures frequently introduce new games. Typically, new games employ new themes (e.g., a jungle themed video slot machine) and/or new player pay out options (e.g., threaded paylines on a video slot machine). New player pay out options are desirable because they give the player more control and flexibility over his gaming environment. In addition, an increased number of payout options increases the variety of odds available to a player. For example, increasing the number of symbols which much match on a video slot machine from three to five allows game designers to create decreased odds and increased payouts. However, current electronic casino games suffer from a lack of new game types, new display modes, and new win evaluation methods.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0002] In accordance with a first aspect of the invention, a gaming apparatus is provided. The gaming apparatus comprises a display unit, a user input device, a value input device, and a controller. The controller is operatively coupled to the display unit, the user input device, and the value input device. The display unit is capable of generating video images. The controller may comprise a processor and a memory operatively coupled to the processor. The controller is programmed to allow a person to make a wager. The controller is further programmed to cause a video image to be generated on the display unit. The video image represents a casino game. In addition, the controller is programmed generate a display of a plurality of three dimensional game options and to receive at least one player selected three dimensional game option from the user input device. Still further, the controller is programmed to determine a three dimensional win evaluation method based on the player selected three dimensional game option. In addition, the controller is programmed to determine an outcome of the game represented by the video image and a value payout associated with said outcome of the game based on the three dimensional win evaluation method.

[0003] In one embodiment, the controller is programmed to modify a pay table and/or a reel strip layout based on the player selected three dimensional game option. In such an instance, the pay table and/or the reel strip layout may be changed without affecting an overall payout return associated with the gaming apparatus. In one embodiment, the controller is programmed to generate a transparent overlay on the display unit. The transparent overlay may be indicative of the three dimensional game option. The transparent overlay may be positioned on the display unit via the user input device by dragging a graphical selector across the video image. The graphical selector may transparently cover a single video slot machine reel position and/or an entire video slot machine reel. In one embodiment, the controller is programmed to generate a first video slot machine symbol within a second video slot machine symbol on the display unit.

[0004] The three dimensional win evaluation method may comprise at least one of combining a plurality of individual layer evaluations, an n-kind extension method, a "Z" layer interaction method, and an extended progressive win evaluation method. In one embodiment, the controller is programmed to determine the outcome of the game based on a number of play layers selected by a player via the user input device. In one embodiment, the controller is programmed to check the player selected three dimensional game option for allowability. Also, the controller may be programmed to check for the availability of sufficient credits based on the player selected three dimensional game option. In one embodiment, a plurality of gaming apparatus are interconnected by a network such as the Internet.

[0005] The video image may represent a game selected from the group of games consisting of video poker, video blackjack, video slots, video keno and video bingo. If the game comprises video poker, the video image may comprise an image of at least five playing cards. If the game comprises video slots, the video image may comprise an image of a plurality of simulated slot machine reels. If the game comprises video blackjack, the video image may comprise an image of a plurality of playing cards. If the game comprises video keno, the video image may comprise an image of a plurality of keno numbers. If the game comprises video bingo, the video image may comprise an image of a bingo grid.

[0006] In accordance with a second aspect of the invention, a gaming method is provided. The method includes the step of causing a video game image to be generated. The video game image may represent a game selected from the group of games consisting of video poker, video blackjack, video slots, video keno and video bingo. In addition, the video game image may represent a plurality of three dimensional game options. The method further includes the step of receiving at least one three dimensional game option. In addition, the method includes the steps of determining an outcome of said game represented by said video game image and determining a value payout associated with said outcome of said game based on said at least one three dimensional game option.

[0007] In accordance with a third aspect of the invention, a memory having a computer program stored therein is provided. The computer program may be capable of being used in connection with a gaming apparatus. The memory includes a first memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause the gaming apparatus to allow a person to make a wager. The memory also includes a second memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause the gaming apparatus to cause a video image to be generated on a display unit. The video image may represent a video slots game. The video image may include an image of a plurality of simulated slot machine reels. Each simulated slot machine reel comprises a plurality of slot machine symbols. The memory also includes a third memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause the gaming apparatus to display a plurality of three dimensional game options. The memory also includes a fourth memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause the gaming apparatus to determine at least one player selected three dimensional game option. The memory also includes a fifth memory portion physically configured in accordance